

# Reexamining Fourth Generation War as a Paradigm for Future War

A Monograph by  
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## Abstract

Reexamining Fourth Generation War as a Paradigm for Future War, by MAJ Brian W. Tinklepaugh, 42 pages.

Since 1989, Fourth Generation War (4GW) has served as a popular heuristic for understanding the contemporary operating environment and related developments in warfare. First proposed by a group of military theorists led by William Lind, 4GW rested on three interconnected claims: first, the nation-state faces a “universal crisis of legitimacy”; second, intrastate war has increased in frequency and intensity in response to state decline; and third, interstate war has become obsolete in the face of nuclear weapons and international norms against “aggressive war.”

This monograph examines all three claims through a “compare and contrast” methodology. Each section lays out a 4GW claim, establishes evaluation criteria, and then contrasts the 4GW claim with alternative explanations derived from political science literature. This monograph finds that 4GW theorists do not accurately describe the contemporary operating environment, nor do they recognize or account for significant continuities in war and politics over the last three centuries. When reexamined within a longer time horizon, patterns of intrastate and interstate warfare after 1945 demonstrate significant continuity, casting doubt on 4GW’s explanatory and predictive value as a paradigm for future war.

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## **Acronyms**

|      |                                    |
|------|------------------------------------|
| 4GW  | Fourth Generation War              |
| FMFM | Fleet Marine Corps Manual          |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| ISIS | Islamic State in Iraq and Syria    |

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## Introduction

As the second millennium A.D. is coming to an end, the state's attempt to monopolize violence in its own hands is faltering.... Should present trends continue, then the kind of war that is based on the division between government, army, and people seems to be on its way out. The rise of low-intensity conflict may, unless it can be quickly contained, end up destroying the state. Over the long run, the place of the state will be taken by war-making organizations of a different type.

—Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*

Whether the nature and character of war remains constant or varies over time constitutes a disagreement centrally import to this paper. The answer to the question bears heavily on what future war may look like. Fourth Generation war (4GW), a theory of war first advocated by William S. Lind in 1989, constituted one attempt at explaining “the changing face of war.”<sup>1</sup> The theory proposed that since the Peace of Westphalia, war had progressed through three “generations” as seen in “dialectical quantitative shifts” in military affairs. Lind explained each of these changes by outlining even broader political, social, and moral revolutions driving the changes in warfare. Lind argued another such change appeared to be taking shape and laid out the framework for war's “fourth generation.”<sup>2</sup>

Writing twenty years later, Lind offered his assessment of the change with these words: “War always changes...but today, war is changing faster and on a larger scale than at any time in the last 350 years. Not only are we...facing rapid change in how war is fought, we are facing radical changes in who fights and what they are fighting for.”<sup>3</sup> Lind offered a specific explanation

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<sup>1</sup> William Lind, Keith Nightengale, John Schmitt, Joseph Sutton, and Gary Wilson, “The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation,” *Marine Corps Gazette* (October 1989): 22-26, 23.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>3</sup> William Lind, “Draft FMFM 1-A, Fourth Generation War, Imperial and Royal Austro-Hungarian Marine Corps,” Project on Government Oversight: Defense and the National Interest,



for the advent of 4GW, stating “at the heart of this phenomenon, Fourth Generation war is not a military but a political, social, and moral revolution: a crisis of legitimacy of the state.”<sup>4</sup> Lind described discontinuity on a historic scale, one profoundly impacting the nature of politics and war.

Lind is not the only theorist to have argued for such profound changes in the nature of war. The Israeli military historian Martin Van Creveld advances the very similar theory of “non-trinitarian” war Lind cites as a major influence on his thinking about the changing nature of war.<sup>5</sup> Section I fully develops this important relationship. Beyond Van Creveld, others have argued the fundamental nature of war changes based on political, cultural, or technological grounds, thus emphasizing discontinuities in war. Mary Kaldor’s work carries on the tradition arguing for fundamental change in the nature of war. After the end of the Cold War, “new wars” defined by culture and fracturing states replaced “old wars” between states and armies.<sup>6</sup> Kaldor puts forward three factors explaining the change: first, increased destructiveness brought about by technology “made symmetrical war, war between similarly armed opponents, increasingly difficult”; second, “global communications greatly increased the visibility of war as well as the sense of solidarity with strangers”; third, globalization “transformed” the state and altered its relationship to

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August 12, 2008, accessed August 7, 2014, [http://www.dnipogo.org/fcs/pdf/fmfm\\_1-a.pdf](http://www.dnipogo.org/fcs/pdf/fmfm_1-a.pdf), 4. Lind’s project is not a government publication and in no way represents the doctrine of the US Marine Corps or any other actual armed service. Lind wrote this document in the style of a fictitious military doctrinal manual (FMFM stands for “Fleet Marine Force Manual”) for a long-defunct state to communicate his ideas on 4GW. Although the anachronistic reference and quasi-doctrinal style spoof actual doctrine, the ideas contained within are intended to be taken quite seriously. Lind establishes his authorship and explains his intentions for the document on his blog where the document resides.

<sup>4</sup> Lind, “FMFM 1-A, Fourth Generation War, Imperial and Royal Austro-Hungarian Marine Corps,” 7.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 6-9.

organized violence.<sup>7</sup> The third factor most significantly influences the move towards “new wars.” As Kaldor writes, “new wars... are associated with state disintegration under the impact of globalization.”<sup>8</sup>

Contemporaneous with Mark Kaldor’s work, MacGregor Knox and Williamson Murray put forward an alternative argument for periodic fundamental change in the nature of war. Knox and Murray theorized that unpredictable “military revolutions” periodically upset the nature of war, although less transformational “revolutions in military affairs” (RMA) indicated that the activity of warfare more typically varies within a military epoch bookended by “military revolutions.”<sup>9</sup> In *The Revolution in Military Affairs*, Elinor Sloan argued, “the central tenet of an RMA is that advances in technology must lead to significant changes in how military forces are organized, trained, and equipped for war, thereby reshaping the way in which wars are fought.”<sup>10</sup> Information technology promised the elimination of “the fog of war” and standoff weapon systems would remove war’s “deadly violence.”<sup>11</sup>

William Lind’s 4GW theory and Martin Van Creveld’s closely associated “non-trinitarian” war fall into the first category, describing change more consistent with a “military revolution” than a lesser “RMA.” Lind and Van Creveld argued (and continue to argue) that nearly all military organizations largely failed to recognize the “transformation of war” and continue to organize, equip, and train their forces under the logic of a now obsolete paradigm of

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<sup>7</sup> Mary Kaldor, “Elaborating the ‘New War’ Thesis,” in *Rethinking the Nature of War*, edited by Isabelle Duyvesteyn and Jan Angstrom (New York: Frank Cass, 2005), 212.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 211.

<sup>9</sup> Williamson Murray and Macgregor Knox, *The Dynamics of Military Revolutions: 1350-2050* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 6-14.

<sup>10</sup> Elinor Sloan, *The Revolution in Military Affairs* (Montreal: McGill Queen’s University Press, 1992), 3.

<sup>11</sup> Angstrom, “Debating the Nature of Modern War,” 15-16.

war.<sup>12</sup> This resulted in the retention of large, technologically sophisticated military forces emphasizing firepower, protection, and centralized command and control, forces that Lind and Van Creveld saw as inappropriate for waging intrastate warfare against non-state actors dominating “Fourth Generation” or “non-trinitarian” war.<sup>13</sup>

As Thomas S. Kuhn argued in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, ignoring a paradigm shift has consequences. Lind applied this reasoning to military affairs, which undergo “dialectical qualitative shifts” comparable to paradigm shifts. Armed forces operating under an outgoing paradigm would become increasingly ineffective as anomalies accumulated. Ultimately, a crisis results and military practitioners adopt a new paradigm that allows them to act in the new environment.<sup>14</sup> Important to Kuhn’s theory, a paradigm shift in science has far-reaching effects on the broader world. 4GW theorists embrace this aspect of Kuhn’s “paradigm shifts” in their application of his theory to military affairs and politics. The effects of armed forces failing to adopt a “paradigm shift” would extend beyond the battlefield, campaign or even war and collapse the state system, disrupt entire societies, and a return humanity to a Hobbesian war of all against all.<sup>15</sup> Avoiding these unfavorable outcomes requires radically flattening organizational structures,

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<sup>12</sup> Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: Free Press, 1991), Chapter 1 on “Contemporary War.”

<sup>13</sup> William Lind, “Reshaping the Pentagon for an Age of Austerity,” *American Conservative*, November 30, 2011, accessed August 27, 2014, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/reshaping-the-pentagon-for-an-age>.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Third Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), x-xii. In the preface, Kuhn describes a “paradigm” as “universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners.” He goes on to explain that anomalies challenging the paradigm accumulate over time until they reach a critical mass better explained by a new paradigm. Anomalies accumulate slowly, but the crisis appears suddenly and overturns earlier understanding.

<sup>15</sup> William Lind, “The Lessons of 1814,” *American Conservative*, May 29, 2014, accessed June 25, 2014, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/the-lessons-of-1814>

shrinking the size and expense of armed forces to alleviate the financial burden placed on the state, and abandoning the “culture of military order” that prevents low-level initiative and impedes militaries from understanding their similarly unconstrained 4GW opponents. To succeed in a qualitatively different environment, traditionally organized armed forces must adopt the new paradigm and radically reform rather than make smaller, gradual changes within the old paradigm.<sup>16</sup>

Fourth Generation warfare thus provided a diagnosis and prescription for recent patterns in warfare. First proposed by a group of military theorists led by William Lind, 4GW rested on three interconnected claims, summarized as follows: first, the nation-state faces a “universal crisis of legitimacy”; second, intrastate war has increased in frequency and intensity in response to state decline; and third, interstate war has become obsolete in the face of nuclear weapons and international norms against “aggressive war.” Derived from a generalization presenting warfare as progressing through distinct “generations,” William Lind, John Nightengale, John Schmitt, and Thomas Hammes argued the US military held to operational concepts derived from previous, supplanted generational thinking. To succeed in the future, the US armed forces needed to undertake extensive reforms consistent with 4GW theory.<sup>17</sup> 4GW offered a systematic and sustained explanation for the emergence of non-state warfare and placed it into the context of declining state capacity.<sup>18</sup>

Since its inception in 1989, conceptual elements of 4GW influenced the intellectual environment within the US armed forces. Although no armed service formally incorporated 4GW

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<sup>16</sup> Lind, “Reshaping the Pentagon for an Age of Austerity.”

<sup>17</sup> Lind, “The Changing Face of War,” 22.

<sup>18</sup> Lind, “FMFM 1-A, Fourth Generation War, Imperial and Royal Austro-Hungarian Marine Corps” 4.

theory into its doctrine, the three components of 4GW remain prevalent as a heuristic for understanding contemporary and future war.<sup>19</sup> General Charles Krulak, intellectual father of the “three-block war,” testified to Congress, “the days of armed conflict between nation-states are ending.”<sup>20</sup> In an article published in 1999, he elaborated by placing the development into historical-political context:

The end of the Cold War heralded not the hoped for era of peace, but rather, a troubling age characterized by global disorder, pervasive crisis, and the constant threat of chaos... In far-flung places like Kenya, Indonesia, and Albania, they have stood face-to-face with the perplexing and hostile challenges of the chaotic post-Cold War world for which the ‘rules’ have not yet been written. The three-block war is not simply a fanciful metaphor for future conflicts — it is a reality.

Certain special operations concepts, although not explicitly linked to 4GW writings, also reflect a similar intellectual basis for thinking about war. The emphasis on weak states, disorder, and “small wars” found in special operations doctrine closely parallels the 4GW framework of declining states, small wars, and increasing global disorder. The epigraph in chapter one of JP 3-05, *Special Operations*, sets the tone:

Today we see a bewildering diversity of separatist wars, ethnic and religious violence, coups d’état, border disputes, civil upheavals, and terrorist attacks, pushing waves of poverty-stricken, war-ridden immigrants (and hordes of drug traffickers as well) across national boundaries. In the increasingly wired global economy, many of these seemingly small conflicts trigger strong secondary effects in surrounding (and even distant) countries. Thus a “many small wars” scenario is compelling military planners in many armies to look afresh at what they call “special operations” or “special forces”—the niche warriors of tomorrow.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Charles Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War,” *Marines Magazine*, January 1999.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Ricks, “US Faces Defense Choices: Terminator, Peacekeeping Glob cop or Combination,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 12, 1999.

<sup>21</sup> Joint Publication (JP) 3-05, *Special Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), I-1. 18 April 2011. The epigraph is from Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War, Survival at the Dawn of the 21st Century* (New York: Little Brown and Company, 1993).

Both General Krulak and the special operations doctrine writers describe what they see as the conditions in which future war may be waged. Describing this reality is one thing, but explaining it is another. Due to its simplicity, 4GW provided a tool for understanding the complexity of politics and war in an accessible manner, utilizing an essentially inductive logical approach. Once armed with this inductive theory, devotees could interpret experiences (personal or historical) through its lens and fit new events within its framework. In short, it was ready-made for military officers seeking a unifying frame for understanding the world and their experiences.<sup>22</sup>

As with all inductive theories, Lind's theory of 4GW requires that all its underlying observations be consistent for the resulting theory to maintain its integrity. No number of confirming observations can confirm the validity of the theory, but a single contradictory example falsifies the theory. If the evidence Lind presents does not support the theory or alternative evidence arises that challenges its base observations, the theory can be set aside.<sup>23</sup> This paper hypothesizes that all three claims underlying Lind's theory will collapse when evaluated with evidence from outside his self-selected "canon."<sup>24</sup> This will show that the nation-state does not face a "universal crisis of legitimacy," intrastate war has not increased in frequency and intensity,

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century* (St. Paul: Zenith Press, 2004), xiii; William Lind, "A Canon for the Officer Corps: Seven Books that Teach Our Troops How to Win Today's Wars," *American Conservative*, July/August 2014.

<sup>23</sup> "The Problem of Induction," University of Wisconsin Department of Philosophy, accessed September 7, 2014, <http://www.philosophy.wisc.edu>. Following David Hume and Karl Popper, induction presents two problems. First, "generalizing about the properties of a class of objects based on some number of observations of particular instances of that class" is vulnerable to refutation by even a single counter example. Second, "presupposing that a sequence of events in the future will occur as it always has in the past" possess serious risk, especially when applied to human endeavors. 4GW faces both of these problems, since the three observations leading to the theory have exceptions and because it seeks to describe war, the ultimate human endeavor.

<sup>24</sup> Lind, "A Canon for the Officer Corps." Lind defends his theory with a self-selected seven book "canon" that he advocates all military officers read. From these books, he asserts military officers will be able to arrive at conclusions similar to his own. The books are intended to be read in an order admittedly selected to persuade the reader of the validity of the 4GW concept.

and interstate war remains possible even with nuclear weapons and contemporary international norms against interstate war.

If this monograph disproves any of the three claims comprising the theory, then the reader may conclude the theory makes unsupported inductive leaps that limit its utility for understanding contemporary warfare or forecasting future developments. Although governments and militaries do not make decisions on training, doctrine, or force structure based on purely logical criteria, any finding that demonstrates that 4GW makes unsupported inductive leaps serves as a cautionary tale for military planners.

In his book on future warfare, noted defense scholar Colin Gray provides some sound advice for futurologists and military planners alike as they grapple with forecasting the future. “Futurologists know not to aspire to anticipate the detail of the time, place, belligerents and technology of future war, but they should harbor the ambition to get many of the really big things right enough.”<sup>25</sup> If one views 4GW in this light, the attempt at forecasting the future based on what they take as the most important political-military patterns is commendable. Rather than focusing on “how wars are fought,” they aim at a higher mark: a theoretical basis for “who fights,” “what war is all about,” “what war is fought for,” “and why war is fought.”<sup>26</sup> As such, criticism that emphasizes 4GW writers’ ideas about *how* war’s are fought fundamentally misses their point.

The more serious criticism --and the one this paper reexamines-- is whether Van Creveld and Lind do in fact “get many of the really big things right enough” in their evaluation of past and current patterns in war.<sup>27</sup> If this paper finds that they err seriously on major issues like the strength of the state and long-term trends in intrastate and interstate warfare, then their

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<sup>25</sup> Colin Gray, *Another Bloody Century: Future War* (London: Orion Books, 2006), 45.

<sup>26</sup> Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, xiii.

<sup>27</sup> Gray, *Another Bloody Century*, 45.

projection of these trends into the future may lack validity. Logically, recommendations for radical force restructuring based on the continuance of a non-existent trend would also remain unsupported by their theory. Such recommendations would require another theory, supported by its own evidence.

This paper examines 4GW through four sections. After fully developing the 4GW theory in Section I, the next three sections respond to 4GW's central tenets about the transformed nature of war through a "compare and contrast" methodology. Each of the three sections lays out a 4GW claim and evaluates it against an alternative explanation designed to show that the nature and character of war has not changed and that lesser changes in warfare have been cyclical rather than progressive.

Section I traces the intellectual development of 4GW theory, providing a summary of the theory, its intellectual pedigree, and its major permutations. A detailed examination of William S. Lind's "generations of war" and Martin Van Creveld's "non-trinitarian" war establishes the three claims and introduces the evidence 4GW advocates utilize to support their inductive theory.

Section II compares the 4GW operationalization of state capacity with alternative measurements derived from political science. From this basis, it then addresses the 4GW narrative of universal state decline and contrasts it with an alternative, more positive interpretation of changes within the international system since World War Two. This section portrays a more mixed picture on the health of the state and state system than that presented by 4GW advocates, calling into question the "decline of the state" narrative as a beneficial lens for interpreting intrastate and interstate war.

Section III examines patterns in intrastate war since 1945, comparing the 4GW hypothesis that intrastate war has become more frequent and intense because of declining state capacity to political science and historical research showing equally frequent and intense patterns



during earlier eras. This section shows that the character of war does change, but does so in a cyclical rather than progressive manner.

Section IV similarly argues that patterns in interstate war vary cyclically over long periods of time rather than declining or waning towards obsolescence. This section first lays out Martin Van Creveld's "waning of major war" hypothesis, places it into the context of similar theorists, and then contrasts it with alternative explanations for the absence of "major war" after World War Two. Specifically, the section contrasts the 4GW theory with work by Paul Schroeder and Peter Wallenstein, who examine the current "long peace" in light of other periods of extended peace since 1815. The contrast between the competing theories provides the contrasting interpretation of evidence needed to judge the value of 4GW as an explanation for the lack of major war since 1945.

Through its four sections employing compare and contrast methodology, this paper will show that the nature of war has not changed, the character of war varies over time but does not inexorably progress through generations, and continuities in warfare will likely continue well into the future. If 4GW does not explain past and contemporary warfare, it cannot serve as a unifying theory of warfare. By disproving the narrative of state decline, the increase in intrastate war and by reinterpreting the "pacific" post-World War II era, this paper undermines the claims that bind together the fundamental logic of 4GW.

### **Section I: Into the Fourth Generation**

To understand 4GW theory, one must first understand the theoretical assumptions and previous work underlying it, including William Lind's "generations of war" and Martin Van Creveld's concept of "non-trinitarian" war. Fundamentally, and for the purposes of this paper, 4GW constitutes a synthesis of these two concepts, allowing for the close comparison of both. During the late 1970s, Lind posited that warfare fundamentally changed following the Peace of Westphalia, marking the beginning of modern war. Lind placed great importance on the rise of

the “Westphalian” state, which he claims markedly altered “who fights and what they fight for.”<sup>28</sup>

Before the Peace of Westphalia, many entities waged war without the intermediaries of states and national armies. In addition to the various empires, kingdoms, leagues, and city-states engaged in warfare, religious organizations, military orders, feudal potentates, and even private citizens waged war against each other over widely varying issues.<sup>29</sup> The state’s absence (or anything closely resembling it) constitutes the common thread linking Lind’s illustrations of pre-modern warfare.<sup>30</sup> Lind cites Barbara Tuchman’s *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*, which describes endemic warfare in the High Middle Ages, as the clearest communication of warfare in the pre-modern era.<sup>31</sup>

As argued by Lind, with the Peace of Westphalia the state achieved “a monopoly on violence” that fundamentally altered the phenomenon of war. According to the generational model of war, this change occurred rapidly following the Peace and marked the beginning of the modern era and the “first” generation of modern war.<sup>32</sup> Van Creveld also used the underlying logic of a state “monopoly on violence” to develop his theory of war in *The Transformation of War*.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> William Lind, “On War #326: Finis,” *Antiwar.com*, December 14, 2009, accessed on September 11, 2014, <http://www.anti-war.com>.

<sup>29</sup> Lind, “FMFM 1-A, Fourth Generation War, Imperial and Royal Austro-Hungarian Marine Corps,” 6.

<sup>30</sup> Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, 192; William Lind, John Schmitt, and Gary Wilson, “Fourth Generation Warfare: Another Look,” *Marine Corps Gazette* (December 1994): 35.

<sup>31</sup> William Lind, “Understanding Fourth Generation Warfare,” *Military Review* (September-October 2004): 16, accessed September 11, 2014, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/lind.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> Lind, “The Changing Face of War,” 22.

<sup>33</sup> “Politics as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Oxford University Press, 1946), 82-83. The concept of a state monopoly on violence originates with the German sociologist Max Weber, whose seminal works form the basis for much writing on the subject of

Following from the emphasis on Westphalia as the transitional moment from non-state to state warfare, Lind and Van Creveld interpreted the Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz's *On War* as the embodiment of the state's "monopoly on violence." Van Creveld defines Clausewitz's body of thought as "trinitarian" war, defined in opposition to an alternative "non-trinitarian" war.<sup>34</sup> Van Creveld emphasized Clausewitz's "primordial trinity," which he asserts only applies to symmetrical wars between similarly organized states, armies, and peoples.<sup>35</sup> In a 1994 article, Lind wholly endorsed Van Creveld's argument and elevated Van Creveld's ideas to a central place within 4GW theory.<sup>36</sup>

Ten years later, a professor at the Army War College, Antulio Echevarria II, countered with a systematic refutation of 4GW claims about Westphalia's impact and the nature of the Clausewitzian "trinity." In "4GW and Other Myths," Echevarria noted that the Peace of Westphalia was only one of several contemporary treaties, did not establish anything resembling the contemporary notion of national sovereignty, and did not even fully end the Thirty-Years' War. He observed that claiming the treaty fundamentally changed the nature of politics and war mistakenly read later developments back into history. This created the appearance of transformational change in warfare while disguising significant continuities.<sup>37</sup> Thus, Echevarria

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political violence. 4GW theorists, however, take liberty with Weberian concepts and language. Weber actually used "Westphalia" as shorthand to describe a centuries-long process of "political expropriation...to monopolize the legitimate use of physical force as a means of domination within a territory." This is quite different from the idea that the Peace of Westphalia represented an abrupt transition in statecraft and warfare.

<sup>34</sup> Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, 38.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>36</sup> William Lind, John Schmitt, and Gary Wilson, "Fourth Generation Warfare: Another Look," *Marine Corps Gazette* (December 1994): 34-37, 34. This is the first article where Lind references Martin Van Creveld's "non-trinitarian" war.

<sup>37</sup> Antulio Echevarria II, "Fourth-Generation War and Other Myths," Carlisle: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute (November 2005), 19.

called into question the “generational model” 4GW claims as the basis of their argument by pointing out the fundamental misreading of how the modern world began and how change occurs.

As noted by Echevarria, Van Creveld and Lind did not differentiate between Clausewitz’s metaphors and the core elements that underlie them. This led them, in his estimation, to mischaracterize Clausewitz and develop an entire counter-theory based on the misconception.<sup>38</sup> Other Clausewitzian scholars, such as Christopher Bassford, Edward Villacres, and Jan Angstrom make effectively the same argument, pointing out the fallacy of confusing the illustration of an argument for its substance.<sup>39</sup> Bassford and Villacres note even eminent scholars fall into this trap and in doing so lend weight to others who cite their misinterpretation as authoritative. Bassford and Villacres describe this phenomenon in detail in their exposition on the eminent British historian John Keegan’s mischaracterization of the Clausewitzian trinity.<sup>40</sup>

As explained by Echevarria, Clausewitz used the metaphors of “state,” “army,” and “people” to represent the underlying concepts of “reason,” “chance,” and “passion” whose interplay constituted the theme of Book One. The “trinity,” therefore, described the most important interactions *within* the phenomenon of war.<sup>41</sup> Reason, chance, and passion respond to each other, sometimes pushing war towards absolutes, but always preventing it from actually reaching its extreme.<sup>42</sup> Each element needs the other, and absent any of the conceptual elements,

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<sup>38</sup> Echevarria, “Fourth-Generation War and Other Myths,” 6-9.

<sup>39</sup> Christopher Bassford, “John Keegan and the Grand Tradition of Trashing Clausewitz: A Polemic,” *War and History* 1, no. 3 (November 1994); Christopher Bassford and Edward Villacres, “Reclaiming the Clausewitzian Trinity,” *Parameters* (Autumn, 1995); Angstrom, “Debating the Nature of Modern War,” 5-6.

<sup>40</sup> Bassford and Villacres, “Reclaiming the Clausewitzian Trinity.”

<sup>41</sup> Echevarria, 9.

<sup>42</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 78.

violence would actually be something other than war.<sup>43</sup>

From their misapplication and, perhaps misrepresentation of the Clausewitzian understanding of the nature of war, the authors of the 4GW model argue the “modern era has witnessed three watersheds in which change has been *dialectically qualitative*. Consequently, modern military development comprises three distinct generations.”<sup>44</sup> These generations arose when social conditions, ideas, and technology combined in the face of a military problem. Forces that adopted the organization, tactics, and doctrine appropriate to the new “generation” quickly dominated opponents yet to make the cognitive transition. Although Lind acknowledged right up front that “military development is generally a continuous evolutionary process,” the emphasis was on the watershed changes.<sup>45</sup>

According to Lind and Hammes, “first generation warfare reflects tactics of the era of the smoothbore musket, the tactics of line and column. These tactics were developed partially in response to technological factors — the line maximized firepower, rigid drill was necessary to generate a high rate of fire, etc.— and partially in response to social conditions and ideas, e.g., the columns of the French revolutionary armies reflected both the élan of the revolution and the low training levels of conscripted troops.” According to Lind, the first generation’s “culture of order” remains its most lasting legacy, with rank structure, uniforms, and military etiquette originating in the 17<sup>th</sup> century continuing through the present.<sup>46</sup>

By 1865, technological change and social organization rendered the first generation obsolete. Increasingly industrialized and centralized states could produce rifled muskets, breech-

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<sup>43</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 87.

<sup>44</sup> Lind, “The Changing Face of War,” 22. Emphasis mine—this is Lind’s term for “paradigm shift.”

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

loading artillery, and prodigious supplies of ammunition capable of supporting massive battles of attrition. Social-political developments like democracy and nationalism also created large pools of motivated soldiers who could remain in the field for long periods. The confluence of these technical and social factors resulted in Second Generation warfare, which Lind characterized as “attrition warfare.” Second Generation warfare emphasized firepower and destruction of the enemy’s fielded forces through battles of annihilation. Grant’s final campaigns in the American Civil War and the Franco-Prussian War constitute two examples of Second Generation war, with the fighting on the Western Front during World War I constituting the “high water mark” of attrition warfare.<sup>47</sup>

Third Generation warfare upholds disruption over destruction, speed over mass, and deep operations over direct attacks on fielded forces. Frustrated by the war of attrition on the Western Front during World War One, the German army developed “storm trooper” tactics to break the operational stalemate and collapse their adversaries by penetrating the forward defenses and attacking operational targets in the rear. Variouslly labeled “blitzkrieg” or “maneuver warfare,” the Third Generation “was conceptually complete by 1918” and only awaited its full implementation against Poland, France and the Soviet Union during the Second World War.<sup>48</sup>

Enter the Fourth Generation. Unlike his first three generations, Lind does not offer a specific year or event marking the transition from 3GW to 4GW. When Lind and Hammes introduced the theory in 1989, they wrote about it as a *future* event.<sup>49</sup> In *The Sling and the Stone*, Hammes modified the theory by arguing 4GW constituted a near parallel development to 3GW,

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<sup>47</sup> Lind, “The Changing Face of War,” 23.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 24.

allowing him to trace 4GW's development to Mao Zedong and the 1940s.<sup>50</sup> As late as 2004, however, Lind's writings still equivocated on whether 4GW had already arrived.<sup>51</sup>

Problems in the underlying logic of 4GW theory explain the unclear transition between "generations." These problems arise from Lind's application of Hegel's dialectic to warfare, which creates a requirement for clear, definitive change. Citing Hegel, Lind uses the term "dialectically qualitative shift" interchangeably with "generational change."<sup>52</sup> In Hegelian thought, the existing idea (thesis) proves unsatisfactory and the new idea (antithesis) obliterates it though dialectic struggle.<sup>53</sup> (Table 1) This results in a synthesis that completely replaces both thesis and antithesis. If warfare progresses through generations in Hegelian dialectic, then an

| THESIS  | ANTITHESIS  | SYNTHESIS                   |
|---|---|-----------------------------|
| A thought is affirmed which on reflection proves itself unsatisfactory, incomplete of contradictory ... | which propels the affirmation of its negation, the antithesis, which also on reflection proves inadequate ... | and so is again negated ... |

Table 1: Hegel's Dialectic

Source: Adapted from *Hegel for Beginners*.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Thomas Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century* (St. Paul: Zenith Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>51</sup> Lind, "Understanding Fourth Generation Warfare," 16.

<sup>52</sup> William Lind, "Important New Book on 4GW," *The View From Olympus* (blog), May 29, 2014, accessed at <https://www.traditionalright.com/author/wslind/page/2/>. Lind's theoretical approach to war is consciously Hegelian. "Much of the writing thus far on Fourth Generation war gets it wrong. Most frequently, the author does not understand that a generational change is a dialectically qualitative shift (doesn't anyone read Hegel anymore?)"

<sup>53</sup> Llyod Spencer and Andrzej Krauze, *Hegel for Beginners* (London: Icon Books, 1989), 14 of 175 pages reproduced online, accessed October 4, 2014, <http://marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/help/easy.htm>

<sup>54</sup> Spencer and Krauze, *Hegel for Beginners*.

emerging “fourth generation” should destroy previous generational remnants. This contrasts with the widespread continuity between generations that Lind so forcefully criticizes when he asserts the US military still resides somewhere between the second and third generations.<sup>55</sup>

Since the new idea “negates” the old idea, we should see a dramatic change between generations with little to no overlap. An absence of a clear transition in warfare would therefore constitute evidence that a “dialectically qualitative shift” has not occurred. The ambiguity expressed by Lind and Hammes themselves shows that recent changes in warfare lack this sort of clarity. This seriously undermines the idea of a “generational shift” into 4GW and casts doubt on the validity of a generational model for warfare. Since Hegel’s model seeks to describe intellectual rather than material change, its application to warfare runs into the inherent problem of war’s dual nature as both a material and immaterial phenomenon. Even sweeping new ideas do not change the face of war in a tidy process. Hammes himself acknowledges this when he explains that “generations” emerge from an evolutionary sans revolutionary process, a point Lind takes strong issue with in an unfavorable critique of Hammes’ *The Sling and the Stone*.<sup>56</sup>

Given Lind’s understanding of how “generations” progress, an analysis of war and warfare that demonstrates continuity, gradual change or cyclical change would cast doubt on 4GW’s utility as a theory of war and warfare. The following sections attempt to do so by comparing and contrasting 4GW claims that the state system, intrastate war and interstate war

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<sup>55</sup> Lind, “Understanding Fourth Generation Warfare,” 12-13.

<sup>56</sup> William Lind, “On War #90: The Sling and the Stone,” November 5, 2004, accessed on September 11, 2014, [http://www.dnipogo.org/lind/lind\\_11\\_05\\_04.htm](http://www.dnipogo.org/lind/lind_11_05_04.htm). “The second book [Lind’s critique considers *The Sling and the Stone* as conceptually two books, one on tactics and one on theory] is a book on military theory, and here Hammes is on less solid ground. He makes a major error early, in that he equates Fourth Generation war with insurgency. In doing so, he equates the Fourth Generation with how war is fought. It is usually fought guerilla-style, but that misses the point: what changes in the Fourth Generation is who fights and what they fight for.” The stark transition constitutes a critical feature of 4GW thinking, one important enough for Lind to take issue with his long-term collaborator.



underwent fundamental changes since World War Two with alternative evidence showing either continuity, gradual evolution or cyclical change.

## Section II: Declining State Capacity

At the heart of this phenomenon, Fourth Generation war is not a military but a political, social and moral revolution: a crisis of legitimacy of the state.

—William Lind, *FMFM-1A, Imperial and Royal Austro-Hungarian Marine Corps*

Belief in the decline of the state constitutes the central condition underlying 4GW.

Understanding 4GW as only a change in military strategy or tactics (i.e., the character of war) fundamentally misses the point, as illustrated above and more extensively in William Lind's disagreement with Thomas Hammes over 4GW as simply an "evolved form of insurgency."<sup>57</sup> In *The Transformation of War*, Van Creveld also argues for a fundamental change in the nature of war, structuring his book according to what he sees as major changes in core aspects of war.<sup>58</sup> These changes require a fundamental rethinking in the defense community that Van Creveld argues has not occurred.<sup>59</sup>

How we think about state capacity features heavily in Van Creveld's accounting. Van Creveld argues that the state is a transitory phenomenon, arising late, reaching its apogee in the late nineteenth century, and precipitously declining after World War Two.<sup>60</sup> He describes a paradox where the decline of interstate war and rise of intrastate war weakens the state, while at

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<sup>57</sup> Lind, "On War #90: The Sling and the Stone;" William Lind, "4GW is Alive and Well: A Special to Slightly East of New," May 25, 2013, accessed on September 12, 2014, <http://slightlyeastofnew.com/2013/05/25/bill-lind-4gw-is-alive-and-well>.

<sup>58</sup> Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, vii-viii. His chapter titles follow: "By Whom War is Fought," "What War is All About," "How War is Fought," "What War is Fought For," and "Why War is Fought."

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 223.

<sup>60</sup> Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, 55-57.

the same time declining state capacity renders interstate war undesirable and increases the likelihood of non-state challengers confronting the state.<sup>61</sup> As this process plays out, alternative social organizations will displace the state, or at least render it irrelevant. Terrorist bands, tribes and warrior societies “may point to the future, perhaps more so than the world of states from which we seem to be emerging.”<sup>62</sup>

This section does not argue against Van Creveld’s account of state formation but takes issue with his description of late twentieth century conditions and his use of them to forecast the demise of the state. Although Van Creveld delves deeply into the past throughout his work, neither Lind or Van Creveld systematically lay out empirical proofs for their assertions about the late twentieth century state system that form the base of their forecasts for the future. Instead, their evidence for state decline is largely anecdotal or informally appeals to other authors who advance similar arguments about rising global disorder.

The following example demonstrates this method of argumentation. In a 2004 article, Lind surveyed the strength of states across the world and found near universal disorder without any differentiation between its diverse states, peoples, or sub-regions. Lind describes the states comprising Latin America as “likely to be an area where the crisis of legitimacy of the state sharpens and Fourth Generation forces grow more powerful,” the “Islamic world” as “a continued source of disorder,” and Africa as “devoured by Fourth Generation War” and destined to a future consisting of “probably war, plague, famine, and death.”<sup>63</sup> Lind then describes Europe’s future as

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<sup>61</sup> Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, 224-225.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>63</sup> William Lind, “Strategic Defense Initiative: Distance from Disorder is the Key to Winning the Terror War,” *American Conservative*, November 22, 2004, accessed on July 25, 2014, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/strategic-defense-initiative-distance-from-disorder-is-the-key-to-winning-the-terror-war>.

questionable, noting, “Europe’s future, like that of the United States, is not so assured as some may assume. Europe has imported an enormous source of disorder in the form of immigrants from other cultures, many of them Islamic. It is by no means impossible that the 21st century will see Europe compelled to undertake a second expulsion of the Moors.”<sup>64</sup> In a similar article, Lind takes his message home and argues, “Even the United States is a prime candidate for the home-grown variety of Fourth Generation war.”<sup>65</sup> Lind cites no quantitative or qualitative evidence for his theoretical claim; one can either take it or leave it.<sup>66</sup>

Martin Van Creveld presents his evidence for declining state capacity more formally, using measures of conventional military strength like the size of fielded forces, number of systems, and percentage GDP spent on the military as indicators of capacity.<sup>67</sup> He also uses operational measures, such as capital cities taken and the depth of advances, to show diminished state capacity.<sup>68</sup> Van Creveld states, “in the years since 1945, first and second rate military powers have found it increasingly difficult to fight each other...both the size of the armed forces and the quantity of weapons at their disposal have declined quite sharply.”<sup>69</sup> Van Creveld lays out

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<sup>64</sup> Lind, “Strategic Defense Initiative.”

<sup>65</sup> Lind, “Understanding Fourth Generation Warfare,” 14.

<sup>66</sup> Lind, “Strategic Defense Initiative.” What he *does do* is cite other theorists, primarily John Boyd: “John Boyd, America’s greatest military theorist, defined grand strategy as the art of connecting to as many other independent power centers as possible, while isolating the enemy from as many independent power centers as possible. The grand strategic question facing the U.S. is how to do that in a 21st century that will increasingly be dominated by non-state, Fourth Generation forces.” Then, just a few lines later, Lind rhetorically asks, “What does Colonel Boyd’s definition of grand strategy mean in such a world?” Lind moves straight to application without making the case for the increased dominance of 4GW forces he just set as the operative condition. Thus, Lind goes directly from theory (his own and Boyd’s) to proscriptions without supporting the theory with evidence.

<sup>67</sup> Martin Van Creveld, “The Waning of Major War,” in *The Waning of Major War: Theories and Debates*, ed. Raimo Vayrynen (New York: Routledge Press, 2006), 102-103.

<sup>68</sup> Van Creveld, “The Waning of Major War,” 105.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 102.

evidence for the decline, citing falling troop totals and quantitatively reduced weapons purchases against the backdrop of an increasingly populated and affluent world.<sup>70</sup>

The implication is that armed forces are shrinking due to state's diminished ability and will. Van Creveld addresses the criticism that inflated costs and increased per unit destructive power of modern weapon systems explain the trend towards smaller armed forces by pointing out that late-twentieth century states expected "more accurate weapons to increase attrition as in fact was the case both in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War and the 1982 Falklands War." He finishes the thought by saying, "logically, late twentieth century states ought to have produced and fielded more weapons, not less."<sup>71</sup> This creates the impression they did not field larger forces because they could not do so.

Van Creveld's use of measures of military strength to operationalize state capacity raises several problems. First, he applies it to "first-rate" and "second-rate" states without considering the very different conditions faced by these states in the international system. Leading powers like the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China, all nuclear states with permanent seats on the UN Security Council and large economies, might make decisions about conventional force levels very differently than Pakistan and North Korea, nuclear powers with very different international circumstances. Similarly, the five powers listed above possessed the overwhelming portion of the 40 million men-under-arms in 1945, so steep declines in their force-levels create the impression of a universal decline that may or may not exist.<sup>72</sup>

Second, Van Creveld acknowledges, "modern economies are extraordinarily productive, and could certainly devote much greater resources to the acquisition of military hardware than

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<sup>70</sup> Van Creveld, "The Waning of Major War," 104.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 102.

they do at present.”<sup>73</sup> This highlights the problem of differentiating between ability and will within Van Creveld’s measures. Many states could spend much more on armed forces, but some potentially could not. Simply looking at what they spend or how many men they put under arms does not differentiate between the two explanations. Demonstrating lack of capacity would require first showing what capabilities the state desires, then showing how close they come to meeting that level.

Third, and most importantly, Van Creveld’s use of military strength as his sole measure of state capacity assumes that his operational variables are interchangeable with the phenomenon he seeks to measure. Immediately preceding his discussion of decreased military capacity, Creveld states, “the outstanding characteristic of twentieth century ‘total’ warfare had been the state’s ability to use the administrative organs at its disposal for mobilizing massive resources and creating equally massive armed forces.”<sup>74</sup> This reflects the idea of the warfare state and the close relationship between wars, the raising of armies, and the emergence of the European state after the seventeenth century developed in works by Charles Tilly and John Brewer.<sup>75</sup>

Tilly and Brewer, however, describe a historical phenomenon and do not claim that the contemporary state operates according to the same process. In fact, Tilly argues that an external process has replaced the process of internal state formation.<sup>76</sup> In the internal model, implicitly Creveld’s, the concentration of coercion leads to greater concentration of capital, in turn providing resources for military capacity and even greater concentration of capital. Tilly argues

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<sup>73</sup> Van Creveld, “The Waning of Major War,” 104.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 97-98.

<sup>75</sup> Charles Tilly, *Capital, Coercion, and the European State: AD 990-1992*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), Chapter 7. John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State 1688-1783* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), Chapter 1.

<sup>76</sup> Tilly, *Capital, Coercion, and the European State*, 195.

that this has stopped or become irrelevant in large portions of the world, explaining why the development models used to evaluate states in the Third World failed.<sup>77</sup> Jeffery Herbst presents a similar argument in his work on state formation in Africa when he points out that topographical conditions and mobile, dispersed populations did not encourage European-style concentrations of coercion.<sup>78</sup> Thus, the strength of a state's armed forces and the overall capacity of the state are not obviously linked and not an appropriate measurement for all states at all times.

Van Creveld's use of military capacity as the sole measure for state capacity, therefore, fails for three reasons. First, it measures states with wildly different power according to the same measure; second, it does not differentiate between the ability and will of states to field large forces; and finally, it assumes a development model challenged by experts on the process of state formation.<sup>79</sup> When examining the capacity of the conflict-ridden, impoverished states that Lind and Creveld place at the center of 4GW, all three of these problems apply.

Other theorists provide an alternative lens for evaluating state capacity, arguing that the fundamental purpose of the state evolved, with wide-ranging repercussions for how it organizes itself and distributes resources. Francis Fukuyama, for example, argued that the purpose of the modern state transitioned from warfare to welfare.<sup>80</sup> Although security remains a requirement, the concentration of coercion becomes an instrumental sans ultimate goal. The real "health of the state" becomes economic growth, educational attainment, and public health, and any attempt at measuring the capacity of contemporary states must take seriously the outcomes states seek.

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<sup>77</sup> Tilly, *Capital, Coercion, and the European State*, 196.

<sup>78</sup> Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), Chapters 1 and 9.

<sup>79</sup> Tilly, "Capital, Coercion, and the European State," 192.

<sup>80</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

These findings are more consistent with observations about international disorder made by Robert Kaplan and Thomas Barnett than with the universalist claims of 4GW advocates. In his “The Coming Global Anarchy,” Kaplan describes the weakest states in the international system and outlines their ability to upset international order. The narrative, however, leaves room for success stories and differentiates between states integrated into the democratic, economically vibrant globalized world and states struggling on the periphery.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, Barnett’s description of a “non-integrating gap” and a “functional core” allows for significant differences between — and even directions in— the capacity of states making up the international system. Although neither Kaplan nor Barnett’s analysis paints a positive portrait, unlike 4GW thinking, it differentiates between regions, individual states, and even communities within these states.<sup>82</sup>

Rather than undergoing any sort of universal decline, trends in state capacity reflect a diverse world of states reacting to a variety of trends that encourage both integration and disintegration. As identified by Kaplan and Barnett, large portions of even the developing world have enjoyed significant gains in human development that reflect increasing capacity for governance. A smaller number of states, however, failed to integrate into the global system, creating a spawning ground for terrorism and insurgency. States have not undergone a “universal crisis of legitimacy,” but rather “core” states such as the United States face the challenge of dealing with the “non-integrating gap.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Robert Kaplan, “The Coming Anarchy: How Scarcity, Crime, Overpopulation, Tribalism, and Disease are Rapidly Destroying the Social Fabric of Our Planet,” *Atlantic Monthly*, February 1, 1994.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Barnett, “The Pentagon’s New Map,” *Esquire*, March 2003. Barnett argues that a relatively small number of countries located in a band of instability are responsible for almost all global security challenges. He labels these states the “non-integrating gap,” characterized by “politically repressive regimes, widespread poverty and disease, routine mass murder, and most important, the chronic conflicts that incubate the next generation of global terrorists.”

<sup>83</sup> Barnett, “The Pentagon’s New Map.”

Since the operative condition of declining state capacity underlying 4GW does not exist as a universal phenomenon and exists within the framework of countervailing positive trends in the developed and much of the developing world, the problems created by low capacity in select states may remain containable and manageable. While the United States armed forces will probably stay engaged along the “seams” of the “non-integrating gap” for the next few decades, it can safely assume risk regarding the worldwide spread of “evolved insurgency” and system-wide state collapse. Policy recommendations that argue for fundamentally transforming armed forces to combat non-state threats err by overstating international conditions favoring intrastate war. The following section examines intrastate war in this contextual light, seeking to determine whether intrastate war has become more frequent or intense since World War Two, providing an additional empirical test of 4GW’s underlying logic.

### **Section III: Trends in Intrastate War**

We are entering an era, not of peaceful economic competition between trading blocs, but of warfare between ethnic and religious groups. Even as familiar forms of armed conflict are sinking into the dustbin of the past, radically new ones are raising their heads ready to take their place.

—Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*

Fourth Generation war (4GW) theorists characterize the period since 1945 as an era of intense intrastate warfare. Martin Van Creveld and William Lind argue for an increased prevalence of intrastate war after 1945, using frequency and intensity of intrastate violence relative to earlier periods as their measures. Addressing frequency, Van Creveld writes, “since 1945 there have been perhaps 160 armed conflicts around the world, more if we include struggles like that of the French against the Corsican separatists and the Spanish against the Basques. Of those, perhaps three quarters have been of the so-called ‘low-intensity’ variety,” producing an



intrastate war count around 120.<sup>84</sup> Van Creveld next addresses intensity, stating, “besides being numerically predominant, LICs have also been far more bloody than any other kind of war fought since 1945.” Van Creveld evidences his claim by tallying fatalities in particularly bloody intrastate wars, arriving at a post-1945 count of 20 million.<sup>85</sup> The frequency and intensity of intrastate warfare since 1945 seems significant.

Van Creveld’s methodology contains two major flaws: first, he does not divide the post-1945 era in a way that allows detection of a trend towards increased intrastate war; second, he does not directly compare the aggregated 1945-1991 era with other historical periods. To accept his argument for an increasing trend after 1945 requires analysis of the distribution of intrastate warfare within the 1945-1991 period. Similarly, proving a particularly bloody period from 1945-1991 requires a methodologically similar comparison to prior historical periods.

In *The Transformation of War*, Van Creveld does neither.<sup>86</sup> Addressing the first objection, Van Creveld compares the frequency and intensity of post-1945 intrastate wars with post-1945 interstate wars rather than analyzing intrastate war data within the 1945-1991 period to determine any trend.<sup>87</sup> While his method could show the relative scale of intrastate versus interstate war, it tells nothing about the trend line in post-1945 intrastate warfare. A high density

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<sup>84</sup> Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, 20. Note that Van Creveld does not provide a formal definition of terms (“low-intensity conflict”) or a quantitative or qualitative operationalization of the term. He does provide a list of LIC’s three “principle characteristics,” but begins each one with a qualifier (“tend to,” “very rarely,” and “most.”) Right from the start, comparing and contrasting Van Creveld’s claims becomes difficult because his definitions, measurements, and empirical evidence are unclear and inexact. This section seeks to clarify his claims so they can be reasonably contrasted with alternative evidence.

<sup>85</sup> Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, 21.

<sup>86</sup> Van Creveld uses innumerable wars to illustrate various points throughout the book, but not to examine the frequency or intensity of intrastate war. Also, his patterns of references to other wars are thematic rather than chronologic, making it difficult to aggregate data into some sort of fair comparison.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

of casualty-producing intrastate wars immediately after World War followed by a gradual diminishment in the later portion of the 1945-1991 era, for example, would be impossible to detect without some way of subdividing the period. This methodological shortcoming limits the ability to discern a trend within the period Van Creveld seeks to examine.

Addressing the second objection, Van Creveld omits a comparison of intrastate war from 1945-1991 with one from earlier periods. Without a comparison to earlier eras using similar evidence, even the most rigorous examination of frequency and intensity *within* the post-1945 period cannot reveal anything about how characteristics of the post-1945 era compares to other periods.

Lind's case for increasing frequency and intensity in intrastate war suffers from similar omissions. In a 2013 article, Lind conducts makes his case for increasingly intrastate warfare with "a quick *tour d'horizon*" of the security environment:

Fourth generation war is spreading from Libya into West Africa, where states are already largely fictions. Syria is now stateless. The Iraq created by the American invasion was always a Potemkin state, and 4GW there is growing fast, in part fueled from Syria. Fourth generation war is again kicking NATO's and the U.S.'s butt in Afghanistan, and entirely predictable outcome of invading the Graveyard of Empires. Far more dangerously, 4GW elements grow ever stronger in Pakistan, where the state is failing. Even in Egypt, which has been at least a proto-state for 5,000 years, the state is shaky.<sup>88</sup>

Lind's anecdotal evidence points out intrastate wars where state weakness plays a major factor and implies the continued proliferation of 4GW conflicts. Even accepting his characterization of these wars, his observations do not demonstrate an overall trend towards more frequent intrastate warfare. He does not establish a baseline level of warfare, acknowledge any concluded wars, nor does he contend with the virtual non-occurrence of intrastate warfare in North America, Europe, East Asia and even large portions of South America and southern Africa. An extensive list of

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<sup>88</sup> Lind, "4GW is Alive and Well."

ongoing intrastate wars, even one containing a considerable number of “new” conflicts, cannot demonstrate a trend.

Arguing for the *intensity* of contemporary intrastate war, William Lind regularly makes comparisons to the worst excesses of the Thirty Years’ War, arguing that post-1945 warfare indicates a return to “wars of mutual annihilation” of the type unseen since before the Peace of Westphalia.<sup>89</sup> In a 2006 article, Lind criticized the Pentagon’s strategy in the Global War on Terrorism by pointing out its annihilative character:

It would be difficult for war objectives to be stated in more maximalist terms. Either they will succeed in turning us into Taliban-style Muslims or we will turn them into happy consumers in globalism's Brave New World. Since most Americans would rather be dead than Talibs and most pious Moslems would rather perish than lose their souls to Brave New World, Mr. Rumsfeld has proclaimed a war of mutual annihilation. That will indeed be another Thirty Years' War, with little chance of a renewed Westphalian order as the outcome.<sup>90</sup>

Lind also uses the Thirty Years’ War as a lens for understanding the internal dynamics of intrastate wars, most recently the struggle between Syria, Iraq, and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Lind asks, “how soon might the coup of Thermidor happen if we are smart enough to stay out? My guess is that we are witnessing the early stages of Islam’s Thirty Years’ War.”<sup>91</sup> All these comparisons to the Thirty Years’ War raise the question of just how closely contemporary events resemble those of the Thirty Years’ War and other periods of intense intrastate warfare.

The remainder of this section compares Van Creveld and Lind’s case for increasingly frequent and intense intrastate war with quantitative political science research into intrastate

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<sup>89</sup> William Lind, “The Long War,” LewRockwell.com, February 10, 2006, accessed September 12, 2014, <http://www.lewrockwell.com/2006/02/william-s-lind/the-long-war/>.

<sup>90</sup> Lind, “The Long War.”

<sup>91</sup> William Lind, “The Brinton Thesis in Action,” *The View From Olympus* (blog), July 2, 2014, accessed September 12, 2014, <https://www.traditionalright.com/the-view-from-olympus-the-brinton-thesis-in-action/>.

warfare since 1945 that disaggregates the 1945-1991 period, allowing for the discovery of any trends. If an unbroken trend towards increasing intrastate war does not exist, then 4GW advocates claims that intrastate war will continue to accelerate in the future can be set aside.

In their 2003 study on intrastate war, Fearon and Laitin found evidence for 127 intrastate wars resulting in greater than 1,000 deaths between 1945 and 1999, similar to Martin Van Creveld's estimate in *The Transformation of War*. Twenty-five of those wars remained active at their data cut-off in 1999. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, they found that the high number of ongoing wars resulted from increased duration rather than increased onset. In the simplest terms, intrastate wars were not *ending* as fast as previously.<sup>92</sup>

Even with this trend in place, the number of countries with ongoing intrastate wars declined by the mid-1990s. By the late 1990s, the number of ongoing intrastate wars was lower than the average across the entire 1945-1999 period. Between 1945 and 1999, seventy-three states experienced at least one intrastate war. This comprised a full one-third of all states in the system, but by 1999, only one-sixth of states experienced an ongoing intrastate war. They note, "the current level of about one in six countries [containing an intrastate war] had already been reached prior to the breakup of the Soviet Union and resulted from a steady, gradual accumulation of civil conflicts that began immediately after World War II."<sup>93</sup> A snapshot in time at the end of a supposedly escalating period of intrastate war contained a lower rate of intrastate war than the post-World War II era as a whole. This challenges the existence of an unbroken trend towards greater levels of intrastate war. Regardless of whether the rate of intrastate war during the post-

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<sup>92</sup> Fearon and Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," 76. Although Fearon and Laitin only count conflicts with over 1,000 battle deaths (the Correlates of War definition for an intrastate war), they use the terms "civil conflict" and "intrastate conflict" rather than "intrastate war" throughout their paper. For clarity, this paper uses the term "intrastate war" throughout.

<sup>93</sup> Fearon and Laitin, 76.

1945 period is high or low compared to other historical eras, the post-war evidence does not indicate an accelerating or even consistently positive trend.

In their study into the frequency and intensity of intrastate war, Fearon and Laitin demonstrate that intrastate warfare between 1945 and 1997 did not increase in frequency according to any sort of positive, linear pattern. In fact, the finding that the incidence of new intrastate warfare after 1990 diminished strongly undermines the 4GW claim about the increased frequency of war brought about by the state's "crisis of legitimacy." This evidence shows that patterns in intrastate war do not indicate an unbroken trend towards larger and more frequent intrastate warfare. Instead, current patterns of intrastate war fall well within historical norms and appear relatively stable, allowing a reasonably confident forecast that upcoming decades will not see intrastate warfare on the grand scale predicted by Van Creveld and Lind.

#### **Section IV: The Waning of Major War**

The decline of interstate war after 1945 constitutes the third building block of Fourth Generation war. Providing an explanation for this phenomenon and relating it to broader developments in politics and war constitutes the focus of *The Transformation of War*. Two subsequent essays, "The Waning of Major War" and "The Transformation of War Revisited," reaffirm and extend his theoretical and empirical claims. This section begins by laying out Van Creveld's argument, placing it into the context of broader scholarship on interstate war, and finally evaluating the "waning of major war" hypothesis in light of competing theory and empirical evidence derived from 1815 through 2007.

Van Creveld begins *The Transformation of War* with an empirical observation: "since 1945 no super power has engaged another in conventional hostilities, and indeed in almost all cases even the threat of launching such hostilities against a superpower has bordered on the

ludicrous.”<sup>94</sup> Accompanying the near total lack of war between superpowers, Van Creveld also notes the lack of war between the superpowers and their rival’s proxies and between unaligned minor powers.<sup>95</sup> The non-occurrence of major war between superpowers and its virtual non-occurrence between their allies since 1945 thus constitute the empirical observation underlying Van Creveld’s argument.

Van Creveld offers two related explanations for the low-level of interstate war since 1945: the advent of nuclear weapons and international norms against “aggressive war.” Starting with what he sees as the more important factor, he writes, “by far the most important factor behind the waning of major interstate war has been the introduction of nuclear weapons.”<sup>96</sup> Like others advancing the argument that nuclear weapons deter all forms of interstate war, Van Creveld stresses the unprecedented range, destructive power and relatively low-cost of nuclear arms.<sup>97</sup> He adds, however, a unique observation when he explains how the process works. Van Creveld argues that nuclear weapons fundamentally altered the relationship between the state and war by severing the link between victory and survival. “From the beginning of history,” he writes, “political organizations going to war against each other could hope to preserve themselves by defeating the enemy and gaining a victory; but now, assuming only that the vanquished side will retain a handful of weapons ready for use, the link between victory and self-preservation has been cut.”<sup>98</sup> The basic logic behind the “nuclear hypothesis,” therefore, assumes a very limited rationale for why states go to war in the first place: self-preservation.

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<sup>94</sup> Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, 17.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>96</sup> Van Creveld, “The Waning of Major War,” 97.

<sup>97</sup> Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, 2-3.

<sup>98</sup> Van Creveld, “The Waning of Major War,” 97.

Van Creveld then presents his second hypothesis, that changing legal, social, and international norms overturned the historic “right of conquest.” Van Creveld stresses the importance of territorial aggrandizement as a cause of war, stating, “for centuries, if not millennia, the most important reason why politically organized societies, including (after 1648) states, went to war against each other had been to carry out conquest and establish territory.”<sup>99</sup> Van Creveld writes, as the “twentieth century was approaching its end major war—at any rate as it applies between states— appeared to be on the retreat. The right to wage it, far from being part and parcel of sovereignty, had been taken away except in cases involving self-defense (and for precisely that reason) they were no longer allowed to benefit by bringing about territorial change. Thus as such war lost its chief attraction.”<sup>100</sup>

Since World War I, public opinion and international law increasingly restricted conditions under which states can wage war. The Charter of the League of Nations, for instance, guaranteed the territorial integrity and political independence of all its members. With the League, “the right to be free of conquest... was recognized as a fundamental international norm.”<sup>101</sup> Van Creveld stresses the wide popularity of Charter of the League of Nations and the subsequent Kellogg-Briand Pact “to renounce war as an instrument of national policy.” To demonstrate widespread war aversion, he evidences the sixty-one nations that ratified the Pact, the use of similar language in the United Nations Charter’s Article 2(4) and 39, and its reaffirmation by UN Resolution 2734 in 1970, which outlawed the use of force to alter any national frontiers. Implicitly, Van Creveld uses widespread government support over a long period as evidence for widespread popular support for the new conception of international law.

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<sup>99</sup> Van Creveld, “The Waning of Major War,” 106.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 109.

Thus, changing public perceptions of war's utility shaped international norms in such a fashion as to make war unappealing to policy makers in a wide-variety of nations over many decades.<sup>102</sup>

Van Creveld sees nuclear weapons and international norms as responsible for the “long peace” following 1945. Since he takes the continued existence of nuclear weapons and international norms against aggressive war and conquest as a given, he forecasts a future where nearly all interstate war will end and remaining conflicts will “transform” into something fundamentally new.<sup>103</sup> This thinking informs Van Creveld's view that states' conventionally organized, high-technology forces and the war plans they developed that employ them constituted “a gigantic exercise in make-believe” since at least the 1950's when the superpowers achieved stable nuclear deterrence.<sup>104</sup> Reordering armed forces to provide a minimal nuclear deterrent, potentially fight small-scale wars against non-nuclear powers, and engage with non-state actors that take up the mantle of war constitute some logical inferences from Van Creveld's theory.

Van Creveld's “waning of major war” hypothesis suffers from two critical problems: first, since it depends on a novel development dated to 1945, the theory tells us nothing about the era *before* the advent of nuclear weapons or the post-World War I international norm against aggressive war. This limits the theory's generality.<sup>105</sup> The novelty of nuclear weapons also leads Van Creveld to begin his analysis with 1945, thus causing him to avoid placing the “long peace” into the context of prior periods with relatively low-levels of interstate war. A longer time horizon might demonstrate several long, pacific periods before the advent of nuclear weapons.

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<sup>102</sup> Van Creveld, “The Waning of Major War,” 107-108.

<sup>103</sup> John Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4.

<sup>104</sup> Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, 13.

<sup>105</sup> Paul Kellstedt and Guy Whitten, *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 41. A theory should be causal, parsimonious and general. Generality measures how widely a theory applies. “All else being equal, a more general theory is more desirable.”



Second, Van Creveld's international norm against aggressive war does not begin until after World War One and did not reach its current form until the formation of the United Nations after 1945. The international norm, which he portrays as something likely to last, failed significantly with the advent of World War Two less than twenty-years after the Kellogg-Briand Pact. Although the 1945-1991 period did see a decline in major interstate war relative to the immediately preceding period, the current, mature form under the United Nations corresponds exactly with the post-World War Two "long peace" he uses it to explain. This makes it difficult to establish whether the international norm caused the "long peace" or vice versa without some outside reference points. Thus, Van Creveld's two explanations may tell only part of the story and do not provide a complete hedge against the reoccurrence of major interstate war.

In their research into the long-term waning of major war, Paul Schroeder and Peter Wallenstein demonstrate prolonged periods of peace since 1815, the starting point for their inquiries. Schroeder frames his discussion by defining a "long peace" as "a significant period in which there was no major war at all within the core international system, though there might be important peripheral conflicts."<sup>106</sup> Schroeder cites two periods containing little to no warfare within the core system, "the two obvious instances of this in Europe are the Vienna-era peace of 1815-54 and the Bismarckian and post-Bismarckian peace of 1871-1914." Peter Wallenstein identifies the League of Nations period from 1918-1939 as a third, more recent period devoid of major warfare. Periods of intense interstate warfare followed all three periods of "long peace."<sup>107</sup>

These three periods spanned multiple decades, followed periods of intense warfare,

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<sup>106</sup> Paul Schroeder, "Life and Death of a Long Peace," in *The Waning of Major War: Theories and Debates*, ed. Raimo Vayrynen (New York: Routledge, 2006), 33.

<sup>107</sup> Peter Wallenstein, "Trends in Major War," in *The Waning of Major War: Theories and Debates*, ed. Raimo Vayrynen (New York: Routledge Press, 2006), 81.

included all contemporary “great powers,” and predated the advent of Van Creveld’s “war-weariness” and nuclear weapons. In terms of duration, these periods lasted forty-three years, thirty-nine years, and twenty-one years respectively. Van Creveld’s “long peace” so far lasted sixty-one years, beginning with the end of the Korean War in 1953.<sup>108</sup> While the current “long peace” has lasted longer than the other similar periods, it has only been marginally longer rather than qualitatively different. This reduces any special significance attributed to the current “long peace” due to its length alone, rather than the level of war within it.

The absence of major war between great powers in the sixty-one years since the end of the Korean War marks a historic occurrence, just not an unprecedented one. As demonstrated above through an analysis of historical patterns of interstate war, multi-decade periods of systemic stability occur regularly, typically following intense episodes of interstate war between major powers. All of these periods occurred before the advent of nuclear weapons and before the development of international norms against “aggressive war” that Martin Van Creveld advances as the causal mechanism for the current “long peace.” This casts serious doubts onto the significance and permanence of these two factors in understanding contemporary patterns in interstate war.

As Wallenstein concludes, “it is too early to claim a universal ending to major war. In fact, there have been long periods without major war. It has been noted that the triangle of Austria-Germany-Russia saw 150 consecutive years without war (1763-1914).”<sup>109</sup> Although long-lasting, these periods tend to end abruptly and transition into periods of intense interstate war. The current “long peace” underlying 4GW’s focus on non-state versus state-centric warfare likely constitutes just another example of this phenomenon, one that will also run its course. Even its

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<sup>108</sup> Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, 17.

<sup>109</sup> Wallenstein, “Trends in Major War,” 90.

admittedly long run does not justify cause for celebrating the demise of interstate warfare.

### **Conclusion**

In his book on future war, Colin Gray lays out both the necessity and challenge of thinking about the future. While predicting the future remains an impossible endeavor, the long-time horizons associated with research and development, acquisitions, and training and fielding modern militaries makes some vision of at least the near future vital to defense planning. Thus, those who attempt to forecast the future must beware overreaching and unnecessarily detailed predictions and instead focus on “getting the really big things right enough.” This paper laid out 4GW’s claims about three of those “really big things” in effort to determine the theory’s utility for thinking about the future of war.<sup>110</sup> When so examined, all three observations underlying Fourth Generation warfare failed to stand up. As a result, their projection of these trends into the future lacks validity and their recommendations for radical force restructuring to combat only non-state threats remains unsupported.

The overarching political context for the “four generations of war,” the rise and ultimate decline of the Westphalian state system, constitutes the first chink in 4GW’s armor. Given their theory as laid out in Section I, state capacity should be on the decline across the entire international system, but as demonstrated in Section II, state capacity has not universally declined since 1945. While endemic weakness remains in the least developed states, this represents incomplete state formation rather than a decline driven by revolutionary developments in warfare. Since states look likely to remain strong and at the core of the international system, their traditional source of power, national armed forces, will remain important tools for combating both intrastate and interstate violence.

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<sup>110</sup> Gray, *Another Bloody Century*, 45.

Also contrary to 4GW claims, intrastate warfare has not increased in frequency or intensity since 1945. Rather than following a unbroken, upward trend, intrastate wars accumulated during the early Cold War, reached a stable level during the 1970s and 1980s, and then fell off in the 1990s. As such, the evidence does not support the 4GW narrative of a fundamental change in the nature of war. Given the lack of a powerful upward trend towards increasing intrastate war, their forecast for ever increasing intrastate warfare becomes hard to accept. Although intrastate war causes widespread death and destruction in the “non-integrating gap,” post-1945 patterns of intrastate warfare do not represent a tidal wave of change destined to spread to the “core states” of the developed world. Given that intrastate war will likely remain a phenomenon of the “non-integrating gap,” developed nations should continue to plan for expeditionary conflicts against non-state threats rather than for the domestic unrest and non-territorial, “non-trinitarian” warfare described by Van Creveld and Lind.

Along with their erroneous conclusions about intrastate war, 4GW claims about the waning of interstate war after 1953 underlie their prescriptions for radical defense reform. Since their theory places interstate warfare on a path towards rapid and irreversible obsolescence, they see little risk in dismantling conventional armed forces in favor of forces designed exclusively for combat against non-state actors. In effect, 4GW advocates ask the reader to “trust them” based on a limited analysis of one sixty-one year period. As demonstrated in Section IV, the “long peace” following the Korean War does not constitute the first “long peace” between major powers. Other pacific periods in the international system have lasted decades only to end abruptly and unexpectedly. Since 4GW theorists do not address the earlier periods or what caused them to end, the 4GW theory can tell little about what factors might cause the current “long peace” to end. Instead, they project the current lack of major interstate war into the future without considering the risk that it might end. Again, 4GW advocates ask us to “trust them” without providing the broader framework necessary to evaluate their claims about the future of war.

Colin S. Gray again provides insight into the difficult business of forecasting the future, writing that “the pressing challenge is for us to anticipate the future as best we are able in ways that reduce, hopefully minimize, the risk of our committing errors in prediction that are likely to have catastrophic consequences. The necessary skill is to pursue a strategy of minimum regret.”<sup>111</sup> Following Gray’s method for judging the ultimate value of a theory of future war, this paper ends with two questions. Given 4GWs bold claims about the demise of the state, the rise of intrastate war and the decline of interstate war, what are the consequences if they are correct? What if they are wrong? This paper briefly speculates on those questions here, but the reader should answer them for themselves in light of their claims and this paper’s counterclaims.

What if 4GW theorists are correct? With the Westphalian state’s collapse, 4GW theorists paint a picture of the future that resembles the “calamitous fourteenth century.” From this starting point, they predict the increase of intrastate war by non-state actors and the decrease of state warfare as the state fades into history. This could be the result of the demise of the current state system, but as Gray argues, predicting the outcome of trends far into the future is impossible.<sup>112</sup> The demise of the state system could result in Van Creveld’s dystopia, but other outcomes are equally imaginable, for example, renewed territorial empires or leagues of loosely aligned mega-cities.<sup>113</sup> Either of these outcomes could suppress intrastate war in troubled regions, or equally result in renewed superpower competition. Alternatively, regional superstates along the lines of the European Union or the intergovernmental structures emerging in North America

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<sup>111</sup> Gray, *Another Bloody Century*, 42.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>113</sup> Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and the European State*, 195.

might suppress both forms of war and usher in the sort of truly pacific era imagined by Norman Angell over one-hundred years ago.<sup>114</sup>

What if they are wrong? Since their being wrong would mean a continuation of long-term historic patterns in statecraft and warfare, the range of likely outcomes narrows. First, the continuance of the state system would make an eventual reoccurrence of interstate rivalry, including interstate warfare, likely. Second, a continued state system will limit the expansion of intrastate war to somewhere within the historic range. A government that misinterpreted these patterns in statecraft and warfare and restructured its armed forces for only intrastate warfare, even large-scale intrastate warfare, would likely find itself unprepared for the reemergence of traditional interstate war. Given that past pacific periods ended abruptly, the state would probably not possess the time needed to raise, train, and equip large air, sea, and land forces organized to combat similarly organized forces. The results of such an error would be catastrophic for the nation making it and for any other nation dependent on it for extended security.

Given the future's inherent uncertainty, "defense establishments know that they cannot help but make many mistakes in their planning, but they can aspire to make mainly small, rather than large, errors."<sup>115</sup> Fourth Generation war does not provide a framework for minimizing the risk of committing errors in prediction, since it bases its predictions on a faulty theoretical framework and on empirical claims that do not stand up to rigorous analysis. It awaits another scholar or group of scholars to unify social science research with historical argumentation that is

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<sup>114</sup> J.D. Miller, "Norman Angell and Rationality in International Relations," in *Thinkers of the Twenty Years' Crisis*, ed. David Long and Peter Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 105-110. Early in the twentieth century, the British politician, journalist, and theorist Norman Angell theorized that increased economic integration, international organization, and the requirement for the support of the local population to extract anything worthwhile from conquest had already rendered war obsolete. Importantly, even Angell did not predict that war would end, only that it rationally *should* end due to its inefficiency.

<sup>115</sup> Colin Gray, *Another Bloody Century*, 46.

both accurate and accessible to military practitioners while minimizing the risk of massive miscalculation.

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